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THE OUTLOOK FOR GERMAN

THE German section at the Conference of Secondary schools held May 9 at the University of Chicago was given over to a symposium on The Outlook for German Instruction. Obviously at this time the heart of such a discussion must be "Judging from the Value of German, what should the Outlook be?" Four speakers discussed that question: Starr Willard Cutting for the colleges; Eda D. Ohrenstein of Hyde Park High School for secondary schools; Charles H. Judd as an educationalist and Edwin Herbert Lewis, of Lewis Institute, from the standpoint of general culture. A brief resumé of each discussion follows:

Dr. Cutting: Before the war modern language was recognized as a necessity if one would keep abreast of the world. Modern language control furnishes material for understanding the psychology and philosophy of a people. Perhaps in the past too great stress has been laid upon the necessity of modern language study for purposes of travel and commerce. But it is certain that the exigencies of modern life have drawn the whole civilized world into a community of interests that renders imperative a knowledge of modern foreign language, and hence every state of importance includes in the work of its schools, the study of the language of its most important neighbors. The fact to be underscored is that the awakening consciousness of all progressive modern peoples has already made the study of modern foreign languages an integral part of all important national education systems. Without control of modern languages, any state, whatever its geographic position, fails to play the rôle of a leader in solving the problems of modern society.

What interests the thoughtful and judicially tempered American in the banishment of German from high school and college curricula, is not the folly of such a step, but its probable permanence. Everywhere in Europe as a significant feature of educational readjustment, we note an unprecedentedly prominent rôle assigned to modern language study, including the language of the hated foe; in Germany, to English, French and Russian; in England, to French, German and Russian; in France, to English and German. In each case, this reform is dictated merely by enlight-

ened self-interest. The danger in America from the exclusion of German language study lies in inertia which will continue exclusion indefinitely unless successfully combated as unwise. The questions we must decide are:—Is such exclusion necessary and satisfactory? Has the war canceled the values hitherto ascribed to German literature, science and music? Have we been wiser in banishing German from our educational systems than our English cousins and the French, who have increased their attention to the study of German? What is the outlook for an early revision of our judgment and a reversal of our action?

Dr. Cutting's paper was followed by Miss Ohrenstein's who based her argument for the value of the study of German in the curriculum of the high school upon a study of the statistics of enrollment for German in the Hyde Park High School, Chicago, from the outbreak of the war in Europe to the close of the semester just closed. These statistics show that from September 1914 to June 1917, the enrollment remained practically constant. Between five and six hundred students or about twenty per cent of the entire membership of the school, were enrolled in approximately sixteen German classes each semester. After our entry into the war, the total enrollment fell to three hundred and seventy-two or seventeen per cent and remained so till June 1918. From September 1918 on, the decrease was rapid—seven and one-half per cent for the semester ending February 1, 1919, and four per cent for the semester ending June 1919. Since no beginning classes have succeeded in securing an enrollment of twenty since February 1918, no classes have been formed, and therefore the enrollment of four per cent bears testimony of the tenacity of life in classes above the first year, and furnishes a strong hope for the future. Since our entry into the war, the study of German has been purely elective on the part of the pupil; any excuse has been sufficient to permit a pupil's dropping the course, and every graduation requirement involving German, waived. Persistence in the study of German required strength of character, for it laid the student open to insult and criticism. No instructor spoke in defense of German but many preached for the immediate cessation of all instruction in German. These facts are important because they help us realize what the existence of two third year classes with a membership of sixty-five the current semester means. For the same semester

the enrollment in Vergil, two classes, was forty-eight; in Cicero, three classes, one hundred and four; in French, two classes, thirty-nine.

What then is the secret of an enrollment of sixty-five, in two third year classes after two years of war. There can be but one reasonable answer—students in German now and in years past, have acquired something real and valuable, and when judgment supplants hysteria, they will restore German in the curriculum. Let us face the language question as presented to the high school student: Latin is fast disappearing because the modern commercially minded student expects to get sound and a story from his language study. He is no longer content to work at mere constructions on a promise of resultant mental drill. He wants a practical training and in this, Latin is wholly wanting. Because of the present commercial trend in education, Spanish has steadily been creeping into our secondary schools. Large classes for beginning Spanish are the rule but at the close of the second year, the registration is too small to form a third year class. Why do so many students drop Spanish as soon as they have fulfilled the requirements of their course? The advocates of Spanish instruction talk a great deal about its commercial value but students soon realize that one must speak a language well before one can transact business in it. Furthermore a language must be taught because its literature is virile enough to make a universal appeal.

If it be true that a foreign language owes its place in the curriculum to the vitality of its literature, there are only two which can permanently hold large numbers of students in secondary schools—French and German. The proper study of French means weeks and months of drill in phonetics and rhythms. If then the student has a quick ear, he gets on well, provided he can master a vocabulary essentially different from that of his daily native speech. The second difficulty which confronts the student is the separation so clearly defined by literature between a Latin and a Teutonic people. In other words the linguistic kinship between French and English is remote; that between German and English is close. This explains the heavy German enrollment. This will restore German to its place in the curriculum.

Dr. Judd believes that the war merely brought about a natural recoil against political meddling with courses of study, and against

bad teaching, and that probably after a year, provided teachers study the problem, perfect their technique and their method of presentation so that the study stands solely on its pedagogical merits, German will take its place again in the curriculum.

Dr. Lewis gave five reasons for the resumption of the study of German. (1) If history proves anything it proves that war does not long prevent the learning of an enemy's language. (2) Soldiers are not returning with hatred in their hearts. They know that we owe diphtheric anti-toxin to a German and a Japanese, and that antisepsis is the co-operative work of Germans, Frenchmen and Englishmen. There is no such thing as national sufficiency in science or literature. (3) Business caution will end by the establishment of international understanding. America will never return to its old insularity. The race is proceeding toward unification. (4) Americans succeed better with German than with other languages; the movement is not too swift; the phonetics are not hopelessly beyond us. When French is well taught a sensitive girl can remember a dozen delicate poems but an American boy finds them unsubstantial. On the other hand he romps through a dozen German songs and from these to noble verse there is only a step. This is not because the boy is temperamentally German, but because the bony structure of the English language is Teutonic. In German, cognates are distinguishable at a glance. The Germans made their learned language from within, and the American boy is fascinated by such linguistic development as is registered in the word "sour stuff" for what we call "acid." (5) But the most potent reason for studying German is "Erdkunde." If the people who object to German in the high schools remembered their geography, they would not oppose it. Germany occupies a central position on the northern plain. A fifth of the world's coal supply comes from German soil, and so long as this coal holds out it will share with the other coal fields in the rule of the earth. Rectification of present boundaries does not touch the heart of the matter.

In the new era upon which we are entering, Germany will be more important than ever before. Henceforth economic factors in government will be clearly seen, and no matter how you regard the probable event of the struggle, Berlin will be the geographical center of it, until that center moves eastward. In due time it may

be necessary for business men of the earth to learn Russian or even Chinese. Certainly in the near future it will be necessary for many of them to learn German. The world is a whole and therefore the whole process of education in the secondary schools should be unified after the method of the sciences. Each science is distinguishable from the rest but not separable. Modern German must be illumined by coal beds, trade routes and so forth. Such a unified system of education might be more potent for peace than all the leagues.